

VZCZCXRO7020
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #4767/01 3640135
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
P 300135Z DEC 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8827
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC// PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 004767

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/29/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: KARBALA PROVINCE: THE ISSUES, THE LEADERS,
POSSIBLE STEPS AHEAD

Classified By: Classified by Robert Gilchrist, Political Counselor, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

¶1. (S) Summary: Karbala, like nearby Najaf, is home to a number of Shi'a religious sites and has become an important tourist destination. Four Shi'a parties control local politics. The JAM is increasing in power. The province recently transferred from CF Control to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC), although some local officials feel the province was not ready. A physical PRT presence could strengthen relations with provincial officials. Moderate political players could increase their influence in the province with U.S. support. This is one of a series of cables by Provincial Reconstruction Teams analyzing the governates of Iraq. End summary.

POLITICAL ISSUES

¶2. (C) The four main parties in Karbala are SCIRI, Da,awa, Islamic Virtue and Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) have begun vying for prominence with regard to reconstruction efforts. While the Governor Aqeel Al Khazali (Da,awa) is a force within the province and a strong Governor, his power is largely due to the largesse of the more powerful Islamist parties (SCIRI and OMS). Karbala province has seen no open signs of campaigning or open jockeying for power for new provincial elections, if they occur in 2007.

¶3. (C) The Governor Al Khazali considers himself one of the more prominent political figures in the region. He has been somewhat problematic in his dealings with the Coalition. At times he has cancelled or cut short Provincial Reconstruction Development Committee (PRDC) meetings at his whim. This sense of importance is likely the result of his feeling that he needs to present a strong image of himself and his party. It is relatively well known that Da,awa is dwindling in power within the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) and Al Khazali governorship is important in the long term for the health of the party.

¶4. (C) In a recent raid in Najaf a leading Sadrism, Sahib Al Amiri, was killed. It was a joint IA/CF raid. This occurred one week post-Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC) in the province and produced a strong reaction by some local authorities, including the deputy governor, who called for an end to CF activities in the Province. Others provincial leaders felt that PIC may be coming too early for the province.

15. (C) Karbala continues to deal with the issue of Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). There are approximately 8000 families on the IDP register. There are an estimated 2000 more that have not been documented. The governor considers the 2000 undocumented families to be a strain on resources in the province. There has been an effort to identify and repatriate these families to their homes either in or north of Baghdad.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

16. (C) The Karbala economy is based largely on tourism, as there a number of Shi'a holy sites in the province. It is very similar to Najaf. Once Najaf,s opens a regional airport, Karbala can count on a surge in religious pilgrims. The effort to accommodate the influx of pilgrims is nascent at this point, but there are talks underway to provide hotels and restaurants for the surge. As a province, despite the somewhat contentious relationship between the governor and the PRDC there has been success in the reconstruction arena. The governor is eager to exert full control of projects. There is de facto provincial control of reconstruction, but even minimal CF involvement causes the governor to bristle. The new PRT has done a good job of connecting with the provincial government and showing how their expertise can enhance the effort. There is a good working relationship.

17. (C) The shortage of fuel in the province is of major concern. This is a problem throughout Iraq, but with the large population of IDP,s in the province it puts a

BAGHDAD 00004767 002 OF 003

particular strain on resources. Prices for fuel are high and availability, except on the black market is low. Food rations are suffering the same fate as fuel. The ability to feed the citizens and IDP,s in the province is under great strain. Obviously, undocumented IDP families receive no rations or assistance other than that of local family members who are citizens of Karbala. This is an invisible tax on families willing to help fellow displaced Shia.

SECURITY

18. (C) The Province has a relatively new IP chief. Abu Al Waleed was chosen by the central government to be the IP chief of Karbala. This has caused some degree of friction between his office and the Provincial Council who tend to believe that they know best what sort of IP Chief the province needs. Al Waleed arrived with some level of notoriety for his work as the commander of the Wolf brigade in Al Anbar province. Some people have seen his tactics as heavy handed and others simply consider them effective.

19. (C) Al Waleed has brought in some of his colleagues from outside the province and seems intent on fighting crime. It is very early in his tenure and he has not taken on Jaysh Al Mahdi (JAM) and it remains to be seen if that is his intention. It must be remembered that much of the &security8 that Governor Al Khazali enjoys comes from OMS and by extension JAM.

KEY POLITICAL FIGURES

110. (S) Hamid Qunoosh: PC Member Karbala and Deputy head of the Integrity Committee. Qunoosh is a very active member of the security committee. He is considered a radical Sadrist. He was allegedly a member of the force that fought CF in Najaf in 2004. He has the grudging respect of PC members and the Governor. (Probably as a result of fear as much as

anything else.)

¶11. (C) Akrum Al Zubaidi: Head of the Integrity Committee. Al Zubaidi is anti-CF and someone who used to have a regular Friday sermon in one of Karbala,s holy shrines. He is also quite radical and is believed to be involved, at least nominally, in Anti-Iraqi forces activity. His work on the Integrity Committee has done little to move the province forward.

¶12. (S) Jawad Al Hasnawi: Deputy Governor of Karbala. Al Hasnawi enjoys the support of Muqtada Al Sadr and by extension is very influential in the province. While Al Khazali is the face of UIA, Hasnawi enjoys a real power to affect the province. There is little question that his relationship with Sadr puts him in position to change the security and economic situation in Karbala. Thus far there is little evidence that he has utilized his power in this fashion.

¶13. (S) Abdul Al Yaseen Al Yasiri: PC Chairman Karbala. Al Yasiri is an Islamist, but he is a follower of the Quietist Hawza (Lead by Ayatollah Sistani.) He has backed followers of Sistani in elections and will likely do the same in upcoming elections. Though not a moderate by any stretch, his relationship to the Marja,aya makes him predictable and somewhat reasonable.

POSSIBLE STEPS AHEAD

¶14. (S) There is a real question about Karbala,s readiness to go to PIC. While there are a number of strong personalities, the work of the PRT has just begun. The PRT will be able to sort out the actual leadership and players in the province. It is obvious that a Da,awa governor in Karbala is more a front than a reflection of political power. That being said, an opportunity exists to bolster more moderate forces.

¶15. (S) If there were a way for members of the PRT to be located in the province it would make real a relationship that has become somewhat hit or miss,. At this stage development of a bureaucracy and the tourism industry are

BAGHDAD 00004767 003 OF 003

extremely important. Karbala is capable of being self-sustaining with the appropriate tools. It is not a long-term project as it is a strong province, but there are still opportunities, with the right access to make a difference.

¶16. (S) The potential for a thriving tourism industry will help reduce violence. Efforts to forge as working relationship between the PC and the IP Chief could also facilitate improved security, by reducing suspicions between the two and -- to the extent possible -- providing political support for the IP's efforts against violence.
SCOBAY